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Contents

Page

5 The Problems of Civil Service Management
Sir Douglas Allen, GCB

9 Sir John Simpson—A Tribute

10 Accentuate the Positive

14 Ask a Silly Question!
P. W. Brierley

26 BSRD—A Valedictory Message
Dr. E. Anstey

35 Reviewing a Legal Branch
P. Nash

41 The Response to the Fulton Report—Part 3

48 Management Accounting in the Civil Service
M. L. Taylor

49 Management Consultants in Government

52 Management Bookshelf
Mrs. B. M. Howard

55 Letter to the Editor

56 Computer Installations for Government Departments

The Problems of Civil Service Management

Sir DOUGLAS ALLEN, GCB

Sir Douglas Allen is Head of the Home Civil Service and Permanent Secretary, Civil Service Department. The article that follows was first published in *Management Review and Digest*, Volume 3, Number 4, January 1977, and is reproduced by kind permission of the Editor and the British Institute of Management. —*Editor.*

One of the major themes of debate at the first BIM National Convention held last year was the proper scope of the functions of government and the share of national resources which should be devoted to them. This issue has two major components, one political and one managerial. The political concerns the goals or major objectives of the government departments within which civil servants work. The managerial concerns the effectiveness of government departments in achieving those goals with the maximum economy of resources. Of course these two elements interact; no Government can afford to determine objectives without attempting to assess the resource costs involved; some ways of achieving an economical use of staff may be ruled out on political grounds. In a sense, therefore, all Civil Service managers are operating in a politically sensitive environment and some of the recent criticism of public servants in general, and of civil servants in particular, fails to recognize the constraints which the environment in which they work impose on the individual manager who is trying hard to do his job well.

There is always a great deal of public interest in the so-called policy-forming aspects of government and in the relative roles of civil servants and Ministers in major decisions. There is by contrast less public interest in the general principles affecting the way the executive actions of government departments are carried out, e.g. the levying of taxation or the paying out of social security benefits. Yet it is in this type of work that the great bulk of the 520,000 non-industrial civil servants are employed. The task of managing this kind of work is by no means an easy one.

Managing change

All managers have to be able to cope with sudden change; for the Civil Service manager abrupt changes in policy are a commonplace. It is his duty to help his Minister to implement the policies of the Government of the day. Politics is about power. The not ignoble desire of the politician is to be in a position of authority to shape the

country's future in accordance with his own vision of the better society. These visions differ and changes of Government can bring a complete change in policy direction so that carefully prepared plans which are on the point of coming to fruition have to be put aside.

There is another kind of change which may require a major upheaval in management structures or plans, namely the change of departmental function when the administrative framework has rapidly to accommodate itself to the merging or splitting of departments or the transfer of responsibilities between them; normally in the interest of deploying the ministerial resources available to the Government to the best advantage.

But there are two features of the modern government machine which bear even more responsibility for differentiating Civil Service management from private sector management, namely the enormous scale of most of the operations of government and the pressure to ensure consistency of treatment of the individual. The scale requires large numbers of people who have to be organized in many units across the country in order to carry out the policies. The desire for uniformity of treatment, coupled with accountability for decisions, requires elaborate codes and rules so that a multiplicity of decision-takers can produce acceptably similar results in similar cases. Inevitably this limits the extent of delegation. There is no simple touchstone by which to decide how much cost should be incurred to ensure uniformity or to eliminate delays—but a decision on this point will have to be taken somewhere in the system, sometimes by the individual local manager and sometimes by the Minister at the top of the departmental machine.

Measuring success

By contrast a private sector institution, although it too has to work within a complex framework of obligations and control, has a measurable test, namely profitability, which it not only can use but is virtually forced to use in order to survive. I do not wish to enter into an unprofitable argument about the propositions that Civil Service management is easier than private sector management because it does not have to make a profit to survive or that Civil Service management is more difficult because it has no simple objective test, either for internal or external use. But clearly the management environment is different. In the public sector there is a vast range of policies with aims which are complex and frequently difficult to establish. Performance in achieving them is usually a matter of judgement and is rarely measurable. For this purpose measures of costs (inputs) without regard to outputs (services) are not sufficient; nor are simple measures of outputs (e.g. number of cases dealt with) which do not have regard to the quality or accuracy of performance.

In the commercial market-place the management can make an assessment of the best obtainable trade-off between quality and price, as this is, at least in the longer term, reflected in the success or failure

of the product. An unsuccessful product can be phased out or the enterprise can withdraw from unprofitable areas of the market. Government departments are not able to pick and choose either their products or their markets in this way. Even where central government is engaged in quasi-commercial operations it is rarely competing in the open market nor is profit as such the aim which the operation is serving. Nevertheless, these are areas where outputs are easier to define and to cost. We have been able to make significant progress here with management accounting and budgetary control systems. This progress in its turn helps to focus more attention on the relative costs of different operations and on the comparatively high cost of all labour-intensive operations. It is clearly desirable that the costs of alternative policies and of alternative ways of executing them should be clearly established even if the problem of choosing between them is greatly complicated by the absence of any simple method of comparing their outputs or defining the level of service.

The level of service provided should reflect the wishes of the community, having regard to alternative ways of using the resources. However, the community normally includes those who benefit directly from the service and those who do not, and their views are likely to differ substantially. It is a commonplace of political life that a small group considerably affected by a service is always much more active and vocal than a large group which is slightly affected or not affected. So the level of service desired will frequently be influenced by the degree of pressure of special interests given the difficulty of anything approaching a cost/benefit calculation for the whole community. Similarly the public view of the way in which the government service uses its resources may well be affected by two conflicting determinants: first the view of those directly affected by this particular service who demand a high level of individual benefit or attention; and second the view of the broad mass of the public who, looking at the total resources required to meet this kind of pressure, may easily be convinced that the reason why so many civil servants are employed in the Civil Service is that Civil Service managements are inefficient.

For most of the tasks it performs efficiency has a direct bearing on the level of resources which the Civil Service consumes, particularly manpower. In the local Social Security office or Jobcentre the public can see civil servants engaged in work which is capable of some evaluation in terms both of the volume and the quality of output and of the costs incurred. We have been giving increasing attention in the Civil Service in recent years to the development of effective managerial systems for monitoring the efficiency of organizational units performing this type of work and have made a good deal of progress. In other areas the difficulty of quantifying output means that we still have to rely on subjective judgements about the performance required, the extent to which it has been achieved, and the implications of that for resources at the disposal of the unit manager.

Resource control

For this reason there will frequently be a degree of tension between central departments concerned with the allocation of resources to the different activities of government and the operational departments responsible for the individual services who are the employers of the unit managers. In the absence of objective tests of levels of service or effectiveness the allocation and control of resources tend to be in terms of inputs (mainly money and staff). In terms, for example, of manpower resources it leads to centralized controls supported by a well-established system of staff inspections. This inability to measure outputs has, in my view, an undesirable consequence in that, in public debate, those who support a particular service frequently treat the amount spent on it as synonymous with its output, a tendency which if carried to extremes encourages waste and underrates what a good manager can achieve by maximizing the output he gets from his staff by seeing that they are used more effectively.

In the private sector the managerial head of an individual unit can often be more readily given discretion in the exercise of delegated authority to achieve his unit's objectives simply because these can usually be more readily defined, agreed and monitored. The Civil Service manager is operating within a framework of relationships which reduce the scope for economy by delegation. The search for new frameworks which would permit greater delegation continues. But it must be remembered that the large concentrations of civil servants are the Inland Revenue (80,000 staff) and the Department of Health and Social Security (93,000 staff) where the pressures towards consistency and equity inevitably constrain the delegation of authority to the individual manager and impose system costs.

Common problems

It might be thought that this framework of relationships imposes on the individual Civil Service manager a task in which a premium is placed on conformity rather than initiative. But this would be to assume that all line managers at a given level in the hierarchy face the same situations and the same tasks. On the contrary each unit manager has his own special problems to cope with arising from differences in his area, in his staff, the character of his clients, etc. He will be required to make the best possible use of the resources at his disposal, to manage his staff effectively, to improve organization and procedures for dealing with the regular traffic and to take the necessary decisions to cope with the unexpected and with the emergency. He has both to understand the technical requirements of the task for which he has responsibility and be alert to challenge rules which are ill-adapted to the individual circumstances of particular cases. And he must bear in mind that the ultimate purpose of all he does is to serve the public interest through serving his Minister.

So, even when full allowance is made for the very different environ-

ments in which they operate, the Civil Service manager and the private sector manager have a very great deal in common. The essentials of the management task are the same and it is desirable that there should be a cross-fertilization of ideas where good management practices are concerned to the maximum extent possible. Above all, a much better understanding of each other's job is very much in the national interest. For this reason increased interchange between the two sectors and joint participation in courses and conferences are very much to be encouraged, even though the former at least has become very difficult to bring about in current economic circumstances.

Sir John Simpson — A Tribute

We have learned with regret of the death of Sir John Simpson. We had already decided, at the suggestion of a veteran reader, to re-publish his article 'Accentuate the Positive' from the September 1946 edition of the *O & M Bulletin*. We are now doubly glad to do so as a tribute to his memory.

'Jock' Simpson was the first civil servant Director of Organization and Methods in HM Treasury, taking over from Sir James Pitman whose letter we publish at page 55. A 'poacher turned gamekeeper' (he first made his name with Douglas—now Lord—Houghton on the Staff Side of Inland Revenue) he demonstrated his O and M flair in a classic wartime study of causes of delay. Combining a shrewd negotiating skill with a charming personality, he not only put O and M on the map in the UK Civil Service but internationally too, in co-operation with his trans-Atlantic colleague, Donald Stone of the US Bureau of the Budget. He persuaded a reluctant Treasury to let him send a team to review the administration of Coventry Corporation, an event which sparked off O and M in local government generally. Long before the days of behavioural science and MbO he practised participative management. At informal monthly meetings with each of his branches even the most junior trainees were encouraged to discuss their current assignments. He developed a fruitful 'old boy' network between departments, reinforced by regular duplicate bridge matches between TOM and The Rest.

The timeless message of 'Accentuate the Positive' is the need to harmonize the various functions of what was then called 'Establishments' work. But the underlying theme is efficiency, or what Jock called 'true economy in both money and manpower'.

Accentuate the Positive

There is a danger that Organization and Methods work will come to be regarded as a specialist activity detached and unconnected with the other elements which comprise the broad field of establishment work. The development of O and M in recent years has been rapid and it is now firmly established throughout the Service but not in all cases has it been assimilated or harmonized with the work of the older sections of establishment divisions. The fact that the O and M branch operates on an advisory and not an executive basis and that its services are freely available to all branches of the department gives rise on occasion to some criticism from other sections of the establishment division who are concerned, as they see it, with more mundane and more important duties.

To some, establishment work in these days is essentially a job of cutting the coat according to the cloth available and unless O and M can show how a job can be done with less of everything—staff, accommodation, and the rest—it is making no useful contribution to establishment work. Others would go further and contend that the personnel side of establishment work is all that matters; a good, well selected staff and a good supervisor will produce the required results even if the organization is indifferent and the methods archaic. This latter argument does not, of course, bear examination since it postulates an impossible association; a good staff would soon cease to be good in such circumstances or would soon rebel against the waste and misuse of their ability. There is no sense in assuming a hypothetical choice between good staff and good organization and methods. In the long run they are inseparable and the one begets the other.

The question whether O and M should, in present circumstances, confine itself to activities likely to produce short-term economies in staff and money and should be effectively harnessed to complementing and grading deserves closer examination. It would undoubtedly be, in the long term, a retrogressive step and would convert what is now a service to the whole department into an establishment control. O and M would become staffing inspection under another name.

The development of O and M work as a service is surely symptomatic of a general development in recent years of what may be termed the more positive or constructive side of establishment work. The establishment officer was created after the first world war and between the two wars the emphasis was on the economy aspect of his responsibilities. A Treasury Circular in 1920 (the only one which attempts any definition of the establishment officer's responsibilities) stated that the Principal Establishment Officer was to be held responsible for *economy* in all matters of staff, organization, and office management.

In the exercise of this negative function and the application to all establishment work of a code of complex and almost immutable regulations the establishment officer came to be regarded as an inverted Micawber—waiting for something to turn down. During the second world war economy went to the winds and regulations were regarded more as servants than as masters. Establishment divisions became the universal providers and produced with astonishing resourcefulness the tools—staff, accommodation and equipment—necessary for every new activity. The essential part they played in almost every achievement was appreciated and acknowledged although a good deal of the opprobrium attaching to establishment work remained, and it is significant that wartime civil servants who paid generous tribute to the Service of which they had been temporary members were nevertheless critical of the establishment branch.

The future development of establishment work as a whole is a subject of first-class importance. Clearly the establishment officer must continue to be concerned with economy in staff, accommodation and other expenditure under his jurisdiction. But economy needs definition and methods of achieving it need re-examination. Effective economy is not achieved by negative control and the rigid application of a code of regulations. The establishment division does not determine questions of major economy involving matters of policy; its normal function is to provide the means to carry out activities already decided upon. True economy, in this field, is synonymous with efficiency which can be defined as 'effective operation with the minimum of non-productive effort'. The contribution which the establishment division can make to the efficiency of a department is not restricted to any one section or branch of the division. O and M and training branches were created with the specific object of improving efficiency but it is not always appreciated that recruitment, complementing, grading, welfare, accommodation and all the other establishment activities are, or should be, equally concerned with the efficiency of the department.

It cannot be claimed that this positive aspect of establishment work is universally recognized and understood in departments or even in establishment divisions. Nor will this be achieved until the traditional functions of the establishment officer are harmonized with the conception of service underlying the more recent establishment activities—O and M and training. The objective of every establishment division should be to build up in the department a reputation for service and to secure acceptance of the fact that its primary concern is with the efficiency of the department. It must be a dynamic, imaginative service which will set the pace and the standard and not operate as a brake on other people's initiative and ideas. This objective will be achieved when branches of the department think of Establishments in terms of help and guidance rather than as an obstacle which every proposal must somehow surmount.

This conception of the establishment division may conjure up in the

minds of some of its officers a vision of wild extravagance and waste. To such, the exercise of establishment control is an indispensable curb on the prodigality of every other branch of the department. Control, if it means no more than arbitrary cutting of requests for staff or accommodation, can never secure true economy and its effect on the efficiency of the department must be disastrous. If an establishment division attempts to exercise economy solely by its own efforts it invariably fails. If staffing proposals devolve into a fight between the head of the branch concerned and the establishment division, in the long run either the former will win or the efficiency of that branch will suffer. The exercise of economy—the achievement of efficiency—must be shared between Establishments and the man on the job; it must be a joint responsibility. Complete co-operation is achieved when the head of a branch in difficulties voluntarily seeks the assistance in the solution of his problems of any or all of the sections of the establishment division—O and M, training, accommodation, personnel—before he formulates his plans and proposals.

Every phase of establishment work has its positive and its constructive feature, although all too often this feature is neither recognized nor developed. It is obvious, perhaps, in the provision of staff and in the work of determining appropriate gradings but it is not so obvious in duties concerned with other personnel matters, for example, the supervision of sick leave. Too often sick leave work is regarded as a purely regulatory function—seeing that the rules are strictly applied and that no-one 'gets away with it'. With such an approach to this important establishment function, an officer who takes frequent spells of sick leave comes to be regarded as a potential malingerer rather than as a subject for sympathetic inquiry into possible causes within the control of the department. Sick leave is a dead loss to the department, a loss which is not measured solely by the number of days' absence. A not inconsiderable proportion of sick leave absences can be avoided and the positive side of this branch of establishment work is to discover to what extent remediable conditions in the office are causing the sick leave. The skilful use of statistics and judicious inquiry into specific cases and other means can make an invaluable contribution to the efficiency of the department and the well-being of the staff.

Equally in other branches of establishment work there is scope for introducing into what have been regarded as regulatory functions an element of positive constructive service to the department and a contribution to increased efficiency. The difficulties of the moment—accommodation, staffing and so on—should not be used as an excuse for a *laissez-faire* attitude, since they increase and do not diminish the need for this re-orientation of establishment work along constructive lines. Indeed, these difficulties will never be overcome unless the establishment division develops a dynamic and imaginative approach to them.

The various establishment functions are all elements of management,

and management is a positive and essential element in all human activity. The word is not popular in the Service and the Service is slow to recognize its importance or to appreciate its many facets. Management in government departments involves every officer who is responsible in any way for the provision of the means necessary for the execution of the department's functions as well as all those who have responsibility for the control and direction of staff, and successful management calls for the closest co-operation between all concerned.

Closer integration of establishment work should not, therefore, involve O and M abandoning its planning activities or any relaxing of its endeavour to secure something better than present circumstances allow. The objective should be to direct all establishment work along the same lines that O and M and training work have been able to develop. Is it too ambitious or unattainable a hope that the day will come when it will be a normal and regular occurrence for the head of an operating branch to call on the establishment division for a complete management audit, either to assist with present difficulties in effectively carrying out the work of his branch or as a routine check-up on efficiency, in which every section of the establishment division will participate? Such a review will include not only the organization and methods employed but the general healthiness of the branch as a living organism. It will include an objective examination of staffing and grading and the adjustment of staff to present and prospective work loads, the efficiency of training methods and the adequacy of the accommodation and equipment. It should also extend to the staff of the branch as individuals, their suitability for the work, the manner and methods of supervision, the claims of individual members of the staff to special consideration in relation to promotion, or wider experience or better opportunities to use their talents. Nor should the physical health of the staff and their general well-being and contentment be neglected.

When that stage is reached there will be complete harmony and purposefulness in the whole field of operations of establishment divisions and, among the many blessings that will flow, will be true economy in both money and manpower.

Ask a Silly Question!

P. W. BRIERLEY, Central Statistical Office

Peter Brierley is a Statistician and Head of the Survey Control Unit, CSO. The Unit is responsible for assessing surveys carried out by departments amongst outside organizations and individuals; and in this connection it organized a series of seminars aimed at improving questionnaire design. In the article that follows Mr. Brierley refers to these seminars and describes the role of the Unit; this is followed by contributions based on five papers presented at the seminars. —*Editor.*

Introduction

'How old was your baby when it arrived?' was a genuine question in a survey undertaken a few years ago, and it illustrates the constant need for care by even the most experienced researchers. To be fair, in this instance the context made the meaning clear as the preceding question was 'Did the free sample of baby milk arrive through the post?'

The need for care and thought was the central theme of three seminars and exhibitions held under the title 'Ask a Silly Question' at the Scientific Societies' Lecture Theatre in 1975, and organized by the Survey Control Unit of the Central Statistical Office. The purpose of these seminars was to provide a more imaginative approach to questionnaire design, and attendance was deliberately planned to include a representative cross-section of those interested in the subject—from central government, local government, market research organizations, academic institutions and businesses.

Sir Claus Moser, Director of the Central Statistical Office and Head of the Government Statistical Service, emphasized in his introductory remarks the importance of form design for statisticians and others who were dependent upon this medium for much of the information essential to their work.

Five papers then followed giving practical guidance on the phrasing of questions, on the layout of questionnaires, and on ways of achieving good response. The essence of these papers is reproduced below.

The demand for places at these seminars and for the subsequent tour of the exhibition was overwhelming, and continued for many months after the last one was held. In order to meet yet further requests a filmstrip has been prepared, accompanied by a commentary on a standard cassette by Martin Muncaster, which may be borrowed freely by those interested. An application form is available from the Principal Information Officer, Central Statistical Office, Great George Street, London SW1P 3AQ (01-233 7489). Accompanying the filmstrip is a booklet containing not only the other contributions reproduced here, but also an extensive bibliography of books and papers on form design.

Form design is only one aspect of the work of the Survey Control Unit. The Unit's primary responsibility is the scrutiny of all government proposals for statistical surveys to be conducted amongst non-government bodies, local authorities, companies or individuals. The aim is to ensure that the demands on respondents are properly co-ordinated, that duplication is avoided and that the form-filling burden is kept to a minimum. The work of the Unit contributes to the collection of high quality statistics since it is unrealistic to expect respondents to give conscientious attention to completing forms if they are approached too frequently, the forms are poorly designed, the questions ill-prepared or if the inquiry is conducted without adequate co-ordination.

Lists of new surveys notified to the Unit are now published each quarter in *Statistical News*; and from its computerized records, the Unit can readily retrieve data about past or continuous surveys including information about the coverage of particular subjects. Inquiries on any aspect of the work of the Unit are welcome, and those interested are invited to contact the author at the Survey Control Unit, Central Statistical Office, Great George Street, London SW1P 3AQ (01-233 7341 or 8551).

How to phrase the questions

N. Bateson

Nicholas Bateson is in the Social Survey Division, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. —*Editor.*

A survey takes the form of a particular kind of structured dialogue between two people—the researcher and his informant; structured in the sense that this is a question-and-answer dialogue in which the researcher's part consists almost entirely of previously formulated questions. The survey data are the verbatim answers of the informants, which at some stage must be converted into numerical form. It is clear that, when the researcher has decided what information he needs to obtain, a great deal hinges on his asking the right questions.

How do we define a 'right' question? Nine points can first be listed under the general rubric that the question must make good sense to the informant and that it should not be too difficult for him to answer:

(1) The question must use words which are familiar to the sampled population.

(2) The question must not be ambiguous. If different informants make different interpretations of the same question, their answers will not be comparable.

(3) The question should be as short and crisp as possible within the limits of the need to obtain analysable material of a certain kind.

(4) The question must ask one thing at a time, not roll two questions into one.

(5) The question should not be framed in the negative.
(6) Many informants prefer to think about particular things rather than about general concepts. Beware of abstractions.
(7) The question should not be too broad. If there is a wide range of possible responses, the informants may find the question impossibly taxing.
(8) A question requiring detailed recall may not get accurate answers. Great care must be taken in drafting such questions.
(9) A question seeking detailed quantitative information may serve simply to confuse informants. Again, care is needed in formulating the question.

If these points are not heeded the researcher cannot expect accurate answers; at best he can expect a distribution of answers scattered at random around a 'true' position. Other errors in question wording, however, lead to systematic error (bias). Of these, the most commonly encountered is the 'leading question', which steers the informant into an inaccurate answer, usually by offering a restricted range of alternative answers for him to endorse which exclude what, for him, would have been an accurate answer. Another source of biased answers is 'response set'—a latent tendency for informants to respond in an inaccurate way, which is catered to or strengthened by the way in which the question is asked. For instance, informants who tend to agree with an authority figure will be likely to assent to what they take to be the researcher's opinion.

The points made above apply equally to an interview survey and a self-completion survey. But self-completion surveys have special question-wording problems which result from the absence of an interviewer. One function of an interviewer is to win rapport with the informant. If there is no interviewer, the first few questions must succeed in interesting and involving the informant in the survey. Another function of an interviewer is to dig for information using various probing techniques. Without this assistance, the researcher must recognize that he cannot obtain the depth and fullness of answer that he might like. He must largely limit himself to asking closed questions. Thirdly, without an interviewer to fill in the questionnaire, the researcher must pay great attention to instructing the informant in how to record his answers.

Several guidelines for question wording have been laid down. But how are these to be achieved? In practice a questionnaire always has to be based on prior study of the population that is to be surveyed. This generally must be done in two stages. First there must be exploratory work, usually consisting of intensive, relatively unstructured interviews with a small sample. The aim is to get a rough map of the universe of content that is to be investigated in the survey proper. Careful content analysis of the interviews reveals the main themes in each area of questioning. On the basis of this work, a questionnaire for the survey proper can be drawn up and this must next be tested on another pilot

sample. A systematic quantitative analysis will be made of the results at this second stage. Any faults in question wording should now become apparent.

Mistakes to avoid

P. Menneer

At the time of the seminars Peter Menneer was with British Market Research Bureau Ltd; he is now with Research Surveys of Great Britain Ltd. —*Editor.*

The following are some examples of the pitfalls that lie in wait for the form designer. In most cases these are questions, both good and bad, that *actually have been asked*—on which the users of the statistics emerging have, presumably, based their decisions.

Imprecision
Not 'When did you leave school?'
But 'At what age did you finish your full-time education?'
National Readership Survey, 1975.

Not 'How many children have you?'
But 'How many children under the age of 15 do you have living at home with you now?'
BMRB/Ford, 1974.

Non-operational concept
The concept of 'dwelling'.
A gallant attempt: 'Does your household share with anyone else the use of any room, or hall, passage, landing or staircase?'
Census of Population, 1971.

Meaningless concept
'To what extent would you consider peanut butter is an alternative to jam?'
Anon.

Logic superb, communication doubtful
'For women aged under 60 who are married, widowed or divorced:
(*a*) Write the month and year of marriage (the first marriage if married more than once).
(*b*) If the first marriage has ended (by the husband's death or divorce) write the month and year when it ended. If not ended, write NOT ENDED.'
Census of Population, 1971.

One in five forms were blank.

Insufficiently directive
'Are there any things that you like to do at weekends that you have to go out of London for, because it isn't possible to do them in London?'
A Council Recreation Study, First Draft, 1971.

Unlikely to yield sufficient detail
'What method of transport does the person normally use for the longest part by distance of journey to the place of work . . . ?'
(supported by notes).
Census of Population, 1966.

Gray and Gee (1972) report 38 per cent understatement of journey to work by tube.

Question layout, numbering and filtering
'(*a*) Did you pay cash for your central heating system or did you obtain credit?
IF "Credit"
(*b*) Was it through your bank, or . . .?
(*c*) Before you had central heating, did you . . .?'
BMRB/Shell-Mex & BP, 1974.

Questionnaire administered by interviewer: question (*c*) omitted in 7 per cent of cases.

Loaded questions
'Do you think there ought to be more calling on people like you by the authorities, or not?'
Anon.

Two questions in one
'Did you know that it is possible to have cooked meals brought to someone's home called the "Meals on Wheels Service", and that there are also luncheon clubs open to retired people?'
A Council Old People's Survey, 1968.

Double negatives
'Would you rather not use a non-medicated shampoo?'
Oppenheim, 1966.

Jargon
Not 'What is the kilowatt loading of this heater?'
But 'How many kilowatts does this heater use when it is full on?'
BMRB/Electricity Council, 1966.

Too colloquial
'Do you find time heavy on your hands, or not?'
A Council Old People's Survey, 1968.

Convoluted questions
'If the best way the Government could give extra help with housing for the needy was by using a means test, would you then say help should be given with or without a means test?'

And leading too—if understood.

Ambiguity
'How old was your baby when it arrived?'
BMRB/Glaxo, 1970.

But to be fair, the context was clear—the preceding question reading: 'Did the free sample of baby milk arrive through the post?'

Hypothetical questions
'Would you like to live in a flat?'
Moser and Kalton, 1971.

Prestige problems
Not 'Do you ever pray nowadays?'
But 'Many people tell us they hardly ever pray except when they are attending a service. How about yourself—do you ever pray on your own nowadays?'
BMRB/Church Missionary Society, 1969.

Embarrassing questions
'For women aged under 60 who are married, widowed or divorced: Enter the month and year of birth of each child born alive to her in marriage. . . .'
Census of Population, 1971.

Details of children not asked of: (*a*) the elderly
(*b*) children born out of wedlock.

What should the form look like?

J. Saville and **G. Watt**

John Saville and Gerry Watt are in the Graphic Design Division, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. —*Editor.*

The format, or size, of a questionnaire is an early problem to be resolved. Most are based on the international A4 size but some questionnaires need special sizes depending on the place of completion or on special processing requirements. There is, of course, a relationship between the size of the form and the type size and layout.

The typeface is an important factor, especially in forms for the general public, where a recipient might be visually disabled. The essential aim

is the legibility of the form. Research indicates that there is no loss of legibility between serif and sans serif type, provided that the basic rules of typography are followed: type size; correct length of line; correct word space; and correct line spacing. Other major related factors are colour (of ink and paper); substance and quality of paper; and printing process.

Basic typographic considerations are:

(1) Type size should—for adult readers—be in the 8 pt. (1/9 inch) to 12 pt. (1/6 inch) range. (This type size, for example, is 11 pt.)
(2) Words set in capitals are considerably less legible than lower case.
(3) Italics reduce legibility but bold does not.
(4) Semi-bold typefaces are preferred by many readers, especially those with poor vision.
(5) Excessively long or short lines are to be avoided but space inserted between lines allows line length to be increased without loss of legibility.

Colour of paper and ink. Paper has many properties, not least in that it comes in different thicknesses, colours and surface textures. The colour can be used to the greatest effect—we all have recollections of buff-coloured forms. Legibility research gives indicators of the effect of printing different colours on to coloured papers. Black printing on to white or lightly colour-tinted paper gives optimum results. It should be noted that various combinations of colour (ink and paper) retard reading to a greater or lesser degree. The following order of legibility is helpful but can only act as a guide because of the countless shades of colour possible:

Description of colour combination	*Loss of legibility*
Green print on white paper	slight
Blue print on white paper	slight
Black print on yellow paper	slight
Red print on yellow paper	medium
Red print on white paper	medium

Ergonomics. Thoughtful graphic design can greatly facilitate the ease and efficiency of completion, processing, filing and warehousing. A selection of questions which may need to be answered prior to designing a form:

(1) In what location does completion take place? Examples: home; office; transport terminus.
(2) Is the questionnaire directed to any specialized sector of the community? Examples: business organizations; students; the elderly.
(3) What are the sequence and importance of the questions?
(4) Are there clear notes and instructions on completing the form?
(5) Is there sufficient space for each question to be answered?
(6) Are related items in a standard style and position?
(7) Is the form to be completed by hand or typewriter?

(8) What is the method of distribution?
(9) Is the processing to be clerical or by computer?

Illustrations can be used functionally to convey lucidly information which is difficult and unwieldy to express in words. This approach is widely used in other areas of communication but infrequently in questionnaire design. There has also been little use of persuasive illustration. This is surprising as it could be a positive contribution to improving response rates. Because of this there is the likelihood of increasing use of both types of illustration in the future.

Printing production. The full gamut of reproduction processes ranges from a photo-copied hand-written form to a type-set printed product. There are many intermediate alternatives, all of which will affect the design, quality and quantity of production. Production methods should therefore be determined as early as possible.

Processing of the data can be extremely expensive and there is an increasing trend towards direct-input forms. In particular, coding boxes can be a gruesome sight if they are not carefully considered. In this, as with many other problems, the graphic designer is often in an excellent position to help.

Working with a computer

M. Brighton

Malcolm Brighton is Managing Director of Document Reading Services Ltd.
—*Editor.*

If a computer is to be employed in handling the data collected then the form design considerations need only be to facilitate getting the data cleanly into the machine. The task of putting the data into a convenient order belongs to the computer system and form designers should resist pressures from inadequate computing systems to pass this buck back to them.

The task of getting the data cleanly into the computer is essentially one of translation—from human language (words and numbers) to computer language (binary code). If it can be automated it should be, because people are relatively slow, inaccurate and expensive in this operation.

There is usually no serious conflict between the requirements of completion and those of data preparation in the matter of form design, though such conflict is popularly thought to be inevitable. The notion that you must settle for a form which is either easy to complete *or* easy to process should be resisted. It usually means that no one is prepared to try hard enough to achieve both.

In practice a good completion design benefits the data processing

department because it produces good responses. If silly or ambiguous or confusing questions produce unhelpful or invalid responses—and, of course, they do—then it is usually the data preparation section that has the job of cleaning the data up. Perhaps this buck ought to be passed back.

There is some commercial compromise between the investment in form design and the number of such forms it is proposed to use. Obviously there is less justification for going to the cost of an elaborate three-colour printing job for a one-off questionnaire sent to a sample of 500 respondents, and in such cases it is sometimes sensible to put up with a certain amount of difficulty when getting the data off the forms rather than double the printing bill or triple the lead time needed. But this reality should not be allowed to excuse all aspects of form design because many desirable features of layout cost neither money nor time, requiring only a little thought and the sort of skill which comes easily from just being interested in the subject.

When the questionnaires or forms are to be processed entirely by hand, the design should try to recognize this. The best way to discover what works and what doesn't is to physically process a few whilst in draft form, when a number of revelations may occur. You discover just how awkward it is to keep switching from 'landscape' to 'portrait'; and all the problems of re-collating multi-page questionnaires if not properly numbered, but properly dropped; and how edge-stapled questionnaires won't always stay open on the desk; and you suddenly realize how much easier it would have been if that third page had been printed in a different colour. . . . They're not earth-shattering discoveries, but collectively they will save you a lot of unnecessary headaches.

It's worth reminding yourself regularly that the data are recorded by *people*, and that people are sometimes silly, confused, inhibited and short-sighted. They are often irritated at having to answer any questions at all, and more so silly ones and most of all obligatory ones. Therefore, if we want sensible and accurate answers we must make it as simple and painless as possible for them. Your data processing personnel are entitled to no less consideration. They too prefer last night's film to today's statistical forms, so anything you can do to lead them gently through it, by clear and simple layout, by functional (and aesthetic) use of colour, by built-in 'signposts' and 'milestones', by examples rather than instructions, and by a layout which doesn't send them cross-eyed after two hours, will be much appreciated. It will also save you money.

Because the basic rules for good design sound obvious in retrospect, and because the tricks of the trade are, individually, pretty unexciting, good design is often undersold. The reality is that attractive forms which are simple and pleasant for respondents and data processing personnel alike to use only look easy because someone has gone to a lot of trouble to make them so.

Postal surveys — Some cursory guide-lines

R. Jowell

Roger Jowell is founder and Co-Director of Social and Community Planning Research. —*Editor.*

The temptation to use postal surveys rather than interview surveys would seem to be almost irresistible during times of economic stringency. After all, their costs are at most about half those of comparable interview surveys and there is nothing inherently less valid about their results. On the contrary, in some ways their results may be less subject to error: within a given budget, for example, a postal survey can employ not only a much larger sample than that of an interview survey, but an entirely unclustered one, since postage rates and contact costs are the same throughout the UK. And, self-evidently, there is no interviewer bias in self-completion surveys.

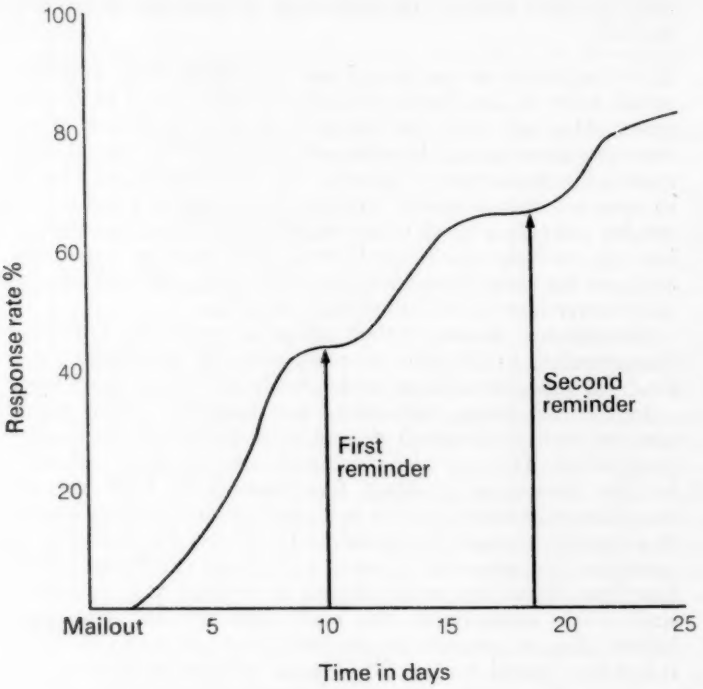
Nevertheless, whatever their advantages may be, postal surveys are inappropriate in certain circumstances. In particular, they are of doubtful value for attitude measurements for three main reasons.

In the first place, open-ended questions (on which many attitude surveys partially depend) do not lend themselves to answer by self-completion. They require an interviewer to probe for full answers. In the absence of probing, few respondents have the confidence, competence or inclination to write more than a cursory phrase in reply to a complex open-ended question. In the second place, the ordering of questions (for example, placing knowledge questions before attitude questions about the same subject) is ineffectual in a self-completion study since respondents can read right through the questionnaire before filling in answers. In the third place, control over the interview is lost in a postal survey. There is no guarantee that the correct respondent will complete the questionnaire or that whoever completes it will give it the attention that it warrants.

So self-completion studies are best used for gathering facts rather than attitudes. It is widely thought, however, that only a small proportion of any sample will bother to co-operate in a postal survey. If this were the case, all the advantages of lower cost or potentially wider coverage would be lost. But, provided that steps are taken to ensure that the mailed questionnaire is not treated by respondents as just another circular (which is, of course, precisely what it is), there is no reason to anticipate a low response rate.

What is it that makes members of the public bother to respond to a postal questionnaire? Of several factors, by far the most important is the researchers' persistence. Most people have to be nagged and cajoled into filling in and returning their questionnaires. The failure to nag them (or to send them reminders or follow-ups, as the process is generally called) will frequently result in a derisory response rate. Generally, two reminder letters are required before the response rate

reaches an acceptable level. The timetable will be something like the one shown in this graph:



The precise shape, size and speed of the response vary dramatically, but its characteristics are constant. The timing of the reminders should be decided on the basis of a graph of response rates along the lines shown above: in each case the optimum time is when the curve begins to flatten off.

To encourage co-operation, the initial letter and the reminder letters should stress three points:

The importance of the study. Unless potential respondents are persuaded that the survey needs to be done, they will be unlikely to bother with it. They have to be convinced of the value to society (or to them) of the cumulated information that will be collected; they have to absorb some of the researcher's enthusiasm and commitment to the success of the study; they have to feel that the effort is worth making. Such conviction seems to be easier to achieve on governmental or local authority studies than on any other research.

The importance of the individual's co-operation. The letters should make it clear from the start that nobody is excluded from the focus of the study. Potential respondents must not be allowed to get the impression (from a quick glance through the questionnaire) that the survey does not apply to them. Where the purpose of the questionnaire is to identify small minorities of the population, it is sometimes advisable therefore to include a few related 'catch-all' questions that will encourage majority identification with the survey.

The importance of speed of response. As a rule, the longer the questionnaire remains uncompleted the less likely it is that it ever will be completed. Explicit deadlines are inadvisable because all too often they have explicitly to be abandoned; a sense of urgency must nevertheless be conveyed. First-class postage (at least on the return envelope) is often advisable.

Several other factors affect response rates: for example the use of incentives (or bribes), the colour of the paper on which the questionnaires are printed, the use of stamps rather than reply-paid envelopes, the use of recorded delivery for the second reminders, the day of the week on which the questionnaires are despatched, and the visual impact of the questionnaires. Although the cumulative effect on response rates of all these 'fringe' measures may be considerable, their individual effects are usually minor. The major factor is persistence in the form of at least two reminder letters. They can push up response substantially, often doubling the rate that would be achieved without them.

BSRD — A Valedictory Message

Dr. E. ANSTEY, Civil Service Department

Edgar Anstey is Director of the Behavioural Sciences Research Division in CSD. The article that follows represents the author's own views and not necessarily those of CSD. —*Editor.*

Introduction

BSRD was founded in October 1970 to provide research-backed advice to CSD on the wide variety of personnel problems associated with implementing the Fulton Report. An account of its objectives and progress was published in this journal in May 1974. Since BSRD is one victim of the economy cuts, I welcome the invitation to present a summary of what has been achieved during the past six years, together with thoughts for the future.

As explained in the 1974 article, about one-third of BSRD's work has been concerned with recruitment and selection; about a third with personnel management; and about a third in the field of organizational studies. The volume of requests to BSRD has not altered much—31 projects were in hand in mid-1976 compared with 29 in mid-1974—but the source of requests has changed considerably. Work on selection has increased because of increasing attention to the selection of specialists. Work on personnel management has declined somewhat from the maximum reached in 1973–74, when the programme of implementing Job Appraisal Reviews (JARs) was at its peak. Work on organization and MS studies has continued at a steady level, but whereas in the early years most studies were sponsored by CSD, during the past 12 months three-quarters of the studies have been commissioned by other departments.

Recruitment and selection

Ever since the war, the main focus of interest in the recruitment field has been the selection of people for senior posts in administration or closely allied grades—Assistant Principals and Direct Entry Principals, senior entrants to the Diplomatic Service, Statisticians, Economists, and the like and, since 1971, Administration Trainees. In recent years the main instrument of selection has been the extended interview procedure, a full two days at the Civil Service Selection Board followed by a Final Selection Board. This method of selection was scrutinized by the Davies Committee in 1969, who reported that 'It is a selection system to which the public service can point with pride'. But the final

proof of the value of this procedure has been the rigorous follow-ups conducted by BSRD. These have demonstrated not only that extended interview entrants have been of very high quality—not in itself surprising in view of the size and high quality of the candidate field—but that gradings by FSB have been of considerable predictive validity. In 1976 we published a long-term follow-up of 'Reconstruction' entrants selected by the extended interview procedure in 1945–48. Nearly all these entrants have achieved good careers, most of the 'border-liners' having become Assistant Secretaries, but most of the 'good entrants' had reached Under-Secretary and most of the 'fliers' had reached Deputy Secretary or Permanent Secretary. The correlation coefficient between the original FSB mark and rank attained (corrected for selectivity) was 0·660, probably the highest validity ever obtained for high-grade selection in any country.

It was not to be expected, therefore, that there was great scope for further improvement in selection for senior posts in the Administration Group, though there will for many years be a continuing need for thorough follow-up of entrants under the AT scheme (or possible modifications of it), a follow-up which will take account of how these entrants have been trained and developed by departments, as well as how they were selected.

Important though AT recruitment is, concern has been voiced in recent years at the disproportionate resources devoted to selection for senior posts in the Administration Group compared with junior posts in that group and all posts in other groups. Increasing attention has been paid to the possibilities of improving the selection to other grades. During the years 1970–72 our main research interest was in the selection of Executive Officers. BSRD has helped the Civil Service Commission to introduce three worthwhile improvements: first, three short objectively marked tests have been introduced as the first sieve. About a quarter of the candidates are eliminated outright, and three-quarters proceed to interview, where the Board takes due note of their scores in these tests and is free to concentrate during the interview mainly on the assessment of personal qualities. Next, to help them, a rating form has been introduced on which each Board member assesses the candidate under seven different headings. After the interview, discussion by the Board of their ratings encourages the pooling of evidence and provides a basis for systematic assessment of the candidate which reduces subjectivity and halo effect. Finally, two-day training seminars have been introduced, centred around practice interviews by each syndicate in turn, with another syndicate and an experienced tutor offering comments on their performance of a critical, but constructive, nature. These seminars have been much appreciated by those attending.

An opportunity to assess the effect of these improvements was provided by follow-up of EO intakes in the years 1959–63 and 1971–72. During this period there was a reduction in the proportion of substandard officers from 9 per cent to 3 per cent, notwithstanding a great

increase in the number of entrants to the Service over that period, which might have been expected to have been accompanied by some relaxation of standards. On the conservative estimate that only half of this improvement can be attributed to the innovations, and assuming that a sub-standard officer is worth only a proportion of what he is paid, a reasonably sound estimate of the net savings is £60,000 per annum. Implementation of another BSRD recommendation to reduce the size of the interview Board from four members to three (which increases the time available for each Board member's questioning, and thus his chance to achieve rapport with the candidate) has been estimated to save another £40,000 per annum. In this context alone, therefore, the estimated savings have been around £100,000 per annum (about half the annual cost of BSRD).

From these and other follow-ups, some broad generalizations can be made which are probably of general application, namely, that interviews have greater predictive validity at the higher end of the scale, whereas written examinations or tests have greater validity at the lower end; if a selection procedure incorporates both written examinations or tests and an interview, it is far better for the procedure to be integrative, i.e. for the interview Board to be armed with all information available about candidates, rather than additive; and if resources permit, a selection procedure is improved by including a personal interview preparatory to the Board interview.

During 1975–76 the CSC has given high priority to considering possible improvements in the selection of specialists, using this term in the broadest sense to include scientists, technical grades, and all professionals outside the Administration Group. BSRD has been glad to co-operate in the relevant research. Our first contribution was an evaluation carried out early in 1975 of the procedure used in the selection of Factory Inspectors Class II. While concluding that the selection procedure generally seemed to be working satisfactorily, the report suggested certain improvements in sifting and short-listing, and recommended that all Board members should be offered short courses in interviewing. These recommendations have been implemented. An evaluation has been made also of the procedures used in the selection of three specialist classes, Architects, Actuarial Officers, and Museum posts, resulting in similar recommendations, including reduction in the size of the Board from four to three and the provision of training courses for Board members. These studies were in effect pilot studies preceding a survey of the whole subject of specialist selection by a Working Party chaired by a Civil Service Commissioner, Mr. Daymond. BSRD has made a substantial contribution to the deliberations of this Working Party, including a new pamphlet on 'The Techniques of Selection Interviewing', which may prove of general interest within the Civil Service and elsewhere.

BSRD has found time also to respond to a request from the Home Office for assistance on Police initial recruitment. Recruitment to the

Police is the responsibility of individual Forces, and until 1974 the situation was chaotic. Each Force used its own written selection tests, varying in content and quality. Following extensive job studies and experiments with 14 different tests on several thousand Police recruits and serving Police Officers, a battery of the five best tests was identified, which is now in use throughout the country. Advice and consultancy are continuing with the preparation of a training film and manual for Police selection interviewers.

In view of the very extensive use of interviewing—in the Civil Service alone the direct cost of selection, promotion and appraisal interviews exceeds £4 million per annum, and the cost to business firms must be far greater—it is remarkable how little research has been done into the efficiency of interviewing and how interviewers could be helped to become more effective. Most of the research findings hitherto published, mainly in America, have been strongly critical of the interview as useless (sometimes worse than useless) for selection purposes, but most of the interviewers investigated have been untrained amateurs, and many of the findings do no more than confirm that bad interviewers conduct bad interviews, a fact not seriously in dispute. A recent BSRD survey of 26 British universities, polytechnics, applied psychology units and other organizations closely connected with interviewing has shown that only two are engaged in any serious research studies. BSRD itself has made a modest beginning with research into 'personal constructs' (the mental frame of reference) of interviewers, the 'calm-alert' state of mind that facilitates 'effective listening' and the processes of decision-making. But much more research is needed.

Personnel management

In this field BSRD's main concern has been advising CSD and other departments on the introduction of a comprehensive scheme of Job Appraisal Reviews, which now covers most staff at nearly all levels. This has been the most obvious application of the Division's motto 'People matter—People differ'. 'People matter' means that it is worth taking a good deal of trouble to help them improve their performance and develop their potential to the full; 'People differ' implies that this is not an easy, semi-automatic process. Nearly all line managers can become competent appraisal interviewers, but systematic training is required to develop their interviewing skills. It is particularly necessary to encourage the art of 'effective listening' to a subordinate's problems, and foster the kind of problem-solving approach which can be most effective in working out solutions to them, but which may never have been demonstrated to some managers before.

From the outset of the JAR scheme in 1971, stress was laid on the need for regular monitoring, and systematic evaluation has been carried out in nine departments. For a description of the results in the Civil Service, and a comparison with 16 outside organizations, reference can be made to our book *Staff Appraisal and Development* published by

Allen & Unwin in August 1976, but the need for evaluation continues, particularly since the requirements of different departments and grades vary. Enough has been done already to check the accuracy or otherwise of some general statements about the usefulness of appraisal interviews, which were in the process of becoming folklore, with little or no scientific evidence to support them. For example:

1. 'Appraisal interviews are more useful at middle levels than for very senior or junior staff'.

False. There is more initial resistance to their introduction at senior levels, and very senior officers are more reluctant to attend a two-day training course but, if they do so, their subordinates are most appreciative of the interviews that follow. At junior levels the requirements are different, in some cases for a combination of appraisal interview and career interview, but the potential benefits are just as great.

2. 'Managers with "consultative" styles of management are likely to make the best appraisal interviewers compared with those who are either "autocratic" or who tend to follow the group'.

True on the whole. But, though all managers can adapt their style to some extent in the light of training and experience, it is *not* recommended that any manager should deliberately adopt a particular style for appraisal interviews only. It is better for him to be himself than to play a part.

3. 'Most staff cannot take much in the way of criticisms during an appraisal interview'.

False. The least successful interviews are those where the interviewer is thought to have been less than candid. Most staff react favourably to criticisms provided that they are presented with the objective of helping to improve performance, and provided that they are balanced by appreciation of work done well.

4. 'Appraisal interviews are most likely to be successful where communications between managers and staff are already good'.

The truth of this statement depends upon what is meant by 'successful'. Appraisal interviews are likely to proceed more easily in such circumstances, but greater improvements in performance may follow from interviews where the communications between managers and staff were previously poor, either because of physical separation, or because the managers gave low priority to the development of their staff.

5. 'The effect of appraisal interviews tends to diminish with repetition'.

On the whole, false. Successive appraisal interviews tend to go rather more smoothly and in some ways increase in effectiveness. Staff certainly form an increasingly accurate impression of how they stand.

Many such results could be quoted. Sometimes 'commonsense' expectations are borne out by evaluation findings; sometimes they are not. The need for research continues.

Other work in the PM field was described in the 1974 article in this journal, including research into the identification of training needs and the evaluation of training courses. In the past, some training courses have been attended mainly by people who happened to have been available at the time rather than because their need for such training had been established; it is questionable whether such training produced any benefits other than a (usually welcome) break in their normal work. The problem of investigating whether people's performance has improved as a result of attending relevant training courses (rather than because of other factors) is a singularly difficult one, probably requiring the use of control groups. But attempts to do this have been made elsewhere, notably by the Eastern Electricity Board, and might be made in the Civil Service also. The Heaton-Williams Report specifically recommended that more evaluation of training was desirable, with BSRD playing a part. We have, in co-operation with Customs and Excise, completed a series of studies into the effect of training courses in the Value Added Tax system, experience from which could be applied elsewhere. Evaluation of training courses has been undertaken in a number of other departments, including the Department of Employment and MAFF. Assistance is being given to DHSS in the design and evaluation of seminars for improving geriatric nursing—a project of great importance in view of the increasing proportion of the population requiring prolonged care in geriatric hospitals.

Finally, BSRD has made a start on research in the extremely important area of career interviewing. Following pilot studies in two departments, the report on a thorough investigation of career development interviews in one major department was published at the end of 1976. This showed that the interviews were going quite well on the whole, but improvements could be made. For example, interviewees should be encouraged to consider beforehand points that they wish to raise, in the same way that the career development officers did. There were also some striking differences between recollections by the two parties of the topics discussed and conclusions reached, for example, about postings. We therefore recommended that the interviewee should be asked at the end of an interview to summarize the main conclusions, and that these points (if agreed) should be recorded on a simple action sheet to be signed by both parties.

Organizational studies

In contrast with the longer-term 'research' projects in the fields of recruitment and personnel management, these are mainly short-term consultancy projects. Their purpose is to ensure that full attention is paid to the *human* aspects of proposed organizational changes. This is essential in order to attract the co-operation and participation of the

staff associations and of the people concerned, without which the full benefits could not be secured and the changes might even be counter-productive. A dozen such consultancy projects have been completed successfully, ranging from a study of factors affecting staff wastage from the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Service of DTI to an assessment, at the request of Civil Service Catering Organization (CISCO), of customer requirements as a basis for planning staff refreshment facilities.

A good deal of work has been carried out in conjunction with Management Services Divisions in CSD. This has included the examination of behavioural factors affecting the improvement of management systems; the ergonomic elements in organization and methods studies; and studies of communications and morale within working units, designed to improve job satisfaction and increase efficiency and effectiveness. Contributions have also been made to Civil Service College courses for O and M practitioners and management advisers.

One major project still in progress is a study for Inland Revenue of the behavioural aspects of installing a computerized PAYE system. An article on the lessons emerging from this and other studies was published by two members of BSRD in the November 1976 issue of this journal under the title 'Computers for People—Designing "Human" Systems'.

Another major project commissioned by DHSS has been an investigation of the problems of the Prescription Pricing Authority, carried out in intimate collaboration with officials of the Authority. Several interlocking recommendations emerged, concerned with various aspects of human motivation and output, the application of which is expected to achieve both financial savings and improved production.

Co-operation with staff associations

While the BSRD wish has always been to co-operate as fully as possible with the National Staff Side and the staff associations in all its work, it must be recorded, with regret, that in the early years some quite serious difficulties and misunderstandings arose. This was partly because BSRD at first failed to appreciate that inquiries among serving civil servants about their attitudes to various aspects of their work were regarded by the Staff Side as their prerogative. One project, proposed studies into the reasons for wastage from various grades of the Civil Service, incurred hostility from the Staff Side on this account and was abandoned. In the discussions that followed this setback, however, complete agreement was achieved on a drill by which CSD or any other department commissioning research from BSRD in any field where the Staff Side would have a legitimate interest would consult them at a very early stage about the proposed project and secure Staff Side approval, support and, if possible, participation in it. This drill has worked well.

A particularly significant step during the past two years has been the commissioning of two BSRD projects jointly by Management and the

Staff Side. The first was a study of job satisfaction among Preventive Staff in HM Customs and Excise. In April 1974 HM Customs and Excise and the Customs and Excise Group, which is the largest trade union in the department, invited BSRD 'to examine the state of job satisfaction in certain tasks following the reorganization of Customs preventive work, at EO and HEO levels'. A joint steering group composed of equal numbers of representatives of the management and the union and one member of BSRD was set up. The study was carried out at the same time as, but independently of, the Customs and Excise management review of Customs preventive work. A large number of recommendations for change were made which have formed a basis for discussion between management and the union since.

The second was a study of appraisal practices in organizations outside the Civil Service, with particular reference to the prevalence of open reporting, and other organizations' experience of it. This was proposed by CSD Management in 1975 and accepted by the NSS on condition that the survey would be carried out by BSRD. A report by four members of BSRD was presented in December 1975 to the joint steering committee of Management and Staff Side representatives, and was accepted by both without any criticisms whatever as an impartial and authoritative survey.

In 1975 it was agreed that BSRD should undertake work on behalf of a staff association. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation had at its 1974 Conference agreed to carry out an examination of the ways and means of encouraging greater democratic participation and involvement of all Federation members at every level of the organization. With the approval of CSD and of Inland Revenue, a BSRD team was set up to undertake such an inquiry, being guided by a Steering Committee composed of IRSF officers and technical consultants.

The team's first tasks were to find out what the IRSF does, how it is organized and carries out its business and how much involvement members have in running its affairs and developing policy. In conjunction with this, an examination of what the term 'democracy' meant, both to IRSF members and more generally in the trade union context, was also undertaken. Much information was obtained by interviewing members and officials in all parts of the country; from talking to headquarters' staff and observing their business; and from attending Executive Committee and Branch meetings and Annual Delegate Conferences. A full cycle of events in the working life of the IRSF was observed to see how each group and level within the organization of the Federation works and interacts with the others.

In order to obtain the members' views on ways in which the Federation might be strengthened, a detailed postal questionnaire was prepared and issued to members, to be answered anonymously. Random samples of members holding office as well as ordinary members were drawn so that those responding to the questionnaire could be seen as being as representative as possible of the whole Federation. Factual

information about attendance at Branch meetings was also collected and a small sample of Branches participated in a survey of members' attitudes towards attendance at meetings.

All this has required much careful collection and co-ordination of information and a detailed analysis of all the material has been carried out. The willingness to co-operate and the quality of the information received from members have been very high, perhaps in part a reflection of the objectivity and integrity that the BSRD team were seen to be bringing to their task, as well as an indication of the members' appreciation of the need for the inquiry.

A report on this project was scheduled for January 1977, i.e. after this article had gone to press, and will, of course, require careful consideration by the IRSF. The Federation has given an undertaking that, apart perhaps from a limited amount of information of a sensitive nature, the findings will be made available both to management and to other staff associations.

Looking to the future

Though BSRD as a division will be disbanded on 5th March 1977, the date of my own retirement, it is inconceivable that the work started by us will not be carried on either in CSD or elsewhere. Some eight BSRD professional staff will remain in CSD, and will maintain a behavioural science presence in the recruitment, personnel management and management services areas, closely integrated with the administrators in their operational tasks. One or more will be joining the Job Satisfaction Unit, which is carrying out pioneering work directed towards increasing job satisfaction mainly through the greater involvement of staff in every aspect of their own work.

Behavioural research units in other Civil Service departments have fortunately emerged from the 1976 economy cuts relatively unscathed, and two of them will play a vital part in tackling problems of great national importance. The Work Research Unit of DE has the responsibility for stimulating and co-ordinating experiments in improving the quality of working life in a large number of companies. The Home Office Research Unit was originally concerned mainly with criminology, but has started to extend its work to wider problems of law and order, in particular means of preventing hooliganism and delinquency. We wish these other research units every success, and we hope that they may benefit to some extent from BSRD experience and ideas, sustained by the same conviction that what is needed to put this country on its feet again is a change in the hearts of men.

The Editor would like to take this opportunity to thank both Edgar Anstey and Ken James, former Head of MS(OR), CSD, who retired from the Service on 27th December 1976, for their help with *MSIG* over the past years; and to wish them a long and happy retirement.

Reviewing a Legal Branch

P. NASH, Customs and Excise

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Introduction

Management Services may not yet have got round to reviewing the organization of the oldest profession in the world, but in this department at least we have recently been looking at our branch of what is sometimes claimed, though not as a rule by its members, to be the second oldest. The review of our Solicitor's Office which was recently completed may be of interest to MS colleagues embarking on reviews in professional branches generally, or in legal branches in particular. This article describes the origins, *modus operandi* and some of the broader conclusions of our review.

Origins of the review

Our Solicitor's Office consists of 85 professional staff (a mixture of barristers and solicitors) and 141 support staff belonging to the administration group. In common with the rest of the department it has recently had to face substantial changes in the pattern of its operations coupled with the sudden expansion necessary to deal with both new work and increased activity in existing fields of taxation and control. The legal complexities of Value Added Tax and the legislative and other ramifications of the United Kingdom's accession to membership of the EEC have presented the lawyers with a whole new set of problems. At the same time they have had to cope with a substantial rise in the number of drugs, currency and other offences prosecuted by the department.

A management review of the whole department took place in 1974–75. During the preliminary stages it was agreed that the Solicitor's Office should not be selected for study in depth as part of the management review, but the Solicitor welcomed the proposal that a review led by the department's own Management Services Division and directed by a steering group (chaired at Deputy Secretary level), on which he himself would serve, should take place during 1975–76. A review team of five was appointed, comprising four experienced management services (O and M) staff and a senior lawyer from the Solicitor's own staff. It is not too soon to mention that despite the differences in background and discipline the members of the team quickly developed a rapport and worked harmoniously throughout the review. Tribal loyalties were frequently manifested on both sides,

but consensus was always reached surprisingly quickly and battle lines were drawn—not unexpectedly—only in debates over semantics in which the legal member of the team usually played the role of judicial referee.

The terms of reference set by the steering group were:

> To review the organization and systems of the Solicitor's Office with particular reference to communications and procedures, and to make recommendations.

Wide enough, as befits an organizational review, but the review team occasionally found itself constrained by them, notably in areas where decisions could be taken only by the administrators, the Solicitor's clients.

Preliminary survey

The first month or so of the review was spent in interviewing senior lawyers and administrators including an important section of the Solicitor's clientele: management in a representative 'Collection', the regional unit in the outfield of Customs and Excise. These inquiries took the form of a preliminary survey with the object of identifying the most fruitful areas for further study. When this preliminary survey was complete it was possible for the team to report to the steering group with a detailed plan for the subsequent stages of the review. The plan contained an outline of the proposed strategy including an itinerary for further interviews in headquarters, the outfield, other government departments and the EEC Commission's headquarters in Brussels.

The final list of areas requiring special attention contained eight elements of which the major ones were relationships and communications between the lawyers and their administrative clients, relationships with other government departments and problems arising in connection with EEC work, but the first and most important item on the list was the role of the Solicitor in the department's decision-making process.

The role of the Solicitor's Office

The review team found that there was no universally understood statement of the lawyer's role in the public service generally or in Customs and Excise in particular. It therefore decided to devise empirically its own definitions of the Solicitor's role and what it felt should be his principal aims. The role of the government lawyer has always been an interesting topic for discussion and comment. Like all institutional lawyers he has two separate loyalties: on the one hand his loyalty to the courts with everything that involves in terms of impartiality and disinterest (not to mention observance of the court's rules and procedures) and on the other his loyalty to his employer, whose aims and objectives must also be his within the limits of the first

loyalty. The review team was reassured to find during interviews with senior lawyers and administrators in Customs and Excise and other departments that serious conflict between the two loyalties rarely arises in practice.

The team's definitions gradually took shape and a paper devoted to role and aims exercised the steering group for the whole of its second meeting. It is worth emphasizing that these definitions represented a distillation of the views of administrators as well as lawyers and that the latter included senior lawyers in a number of major departments. The agreed version of the definition of the Solicitor's aims is thought to be of sufficient general interest to warrant reprinting in full:

Aims of the Solicitor for the Customs and Excise
The aims of the Solicitor in fulfilling his role should be:

1. To give advice which is:
   (*a*) clear, unambiguous and comprehensive;
   (*b*) well considered and takes account of advice previously given;
   (*c*) sound and constructive and pays due regard to administrative problems;
   (*d*) prompt and timely; and
   (*e*) where appropriate, indicates the risks involved in alternative courses of action or the probability of success.
2. To co-operate with the administration in ensuring that Customs and Excise legislation, whether primary or subordinate (including European Community legislation), is clearly and accurately drafted and provides a sufficient legal framework for sound administration.
3. To prepare legal documentation promptly and accurately.
4. To prepare and present the department's case in the criminal and civil courts fairly and effectively.
5. To support the department's case effectively in discussions and negotiations.
6. To give the department timely notice of developments involving the law and the administration of justice, and to offer such advice as will safeguard the department's interests.
7. To manage, train and equip his professional and non-professional staff efficiently and effectively.
8. To co-operate with the administration in ensuring that the department's headquarters and outfield staff receive appropriate and effective training in legal matters.
9. To support the aims and objectives of the administration, consistently with maintenance of the highest professional standards.

Team organization

Having thus built a foundation for the recommendations to come, the review team split into two sub-teams, each specializing in the study of one or other of the main features or functions of the Solicitor's Office. At regular intervals the sub-teams came together to discuss progress and to formulate recommendations for change. Full exchange of notes

of interviews was an essential concomitant of this arrangement and by the end of the review some 130 interviews had been conducted, the review team usually being represented by two people, one to 'lead', the other to write the notes.

The sub-team approach was well suited to the organization of the Office, which was divided functionally and physically into two main elements: the advisory divisions, responsible for advising the administrators on legal matters and for drafting new legislation on the administrators' instructions; and the prosecution divisions, responsible for all legal work arising from fraud or crime against departmental law. At a later stage of the review the team (as a good review team should) questioned this organizational dichotomy, and examined the possibility of an arrangement under which, for example, all VAT work, whether advisory, legislative, or for processing through the civil or criminal courts, would be dealt with by a single division. The proposition was finally discarded because the team became convinced not only that there were fundamental differences in the character of advisory and prosecution work, but also that the pressures arising from the two calendars, the one centred around an annual budget, the other dependent on the steady relentless timetable of the courts, were not compatible.

Prosecution work

The review team's interviews with lawyers and administrators in headquarters and with investigation and outfield staff had revealed that there were a number of different and in some cases conflicting views on the role and purpose of the department's lawyers when prosecuting in the courts. Various authorities were consulted and a recommendation made that a suitably worded definition of that role should be given appropriate publicity and included in the department's training material.

The allocation of work to the four prosecution divisions had been based on a geographical arrangement, each division taking, or in the more serious cases briefing Counsel for, all prosecution work arising in the areas of jurisdiction of a number of specified courts. This method had been satisfactory in pre-VAT days, but had latterly led to unequal workloads and other management difficulties. Before the review began the management had decided to allocate cases to divisions on a random basis, which had the effect of levelling up the workloads but had led to difficulties of communication between the Solicitor's Office and its main 'clients' in the prosecution field—the department's investigation and outfield staff. The team recommended that each of the prosecution divisions should be allocated the criminal work arising in a number of specified Collections. At the same time each of the prosecution divisions would have a special responsibility for giving advice to headquarters directorates on one or more technical subjects, e.g. VAT fraud, drugs offences, exchange control, etc. Among the benefits of what would be in effect a client-orientated reorganization should be a strengthening of

the relationship between the two sides and an improvement in communications. This recommendation was accepted by the Solicitor and put into effect before the end of the review. At the time of writing it seems to be working well, particularly for the outfield staff.

The advisory and legislative functions

The other sub-team discovered that on the advisory side there was need for a clear definition of the qualities the department should expect of the advice it seeks from its lawyers (see the definition of aims). Equally important in the team's view, however, was the manner in which that advice was sought and the spirit in which it was received. This may sound like a statement of the obvious, but it is possible to lose sight of the fact that rapport between lawyer and client and an understanding by each of the other's problems are as important for lawyer and administrator in institutional organizations (and especially in government departments) as for solicitors in private practice and their clients.

The review team looked at the mechanism of the advisory function and at the method by which Customs and Excise law evolves. The part played by the Solicitor's Office in the drafting of law was compared with that played by lawyers in other departments. The possibility of administrators instructing Parliamentary Counsel direct in respect of certain legislation was discussed at some length in the final report, although the conclusion reached by the team was that the existing triangular arrangement whereby administrators brief the lawyers who in turn instruct Parliamentary Counsel should continue, at any rate for the time being. Drawing attention to the highly successful use of the multi-discipline team approach in the planning of VAT law and procedures, the team recommended that this approach should be adopted where possible in the future.

In order to establish the appropriate role for the lawyer in the formulation of EEC law it was necessary for the team to get to grips with the complexities of the Community's drafting processes and to understand the functions of the EEC Commission and Council and their various committees and working parties. The greater part of the EEC chapter of the team's final report is devoted to a detailed analysis of these processes which is to be given wide publicity within the department because of its educational value, especially for newcomers to EEC work. The team's recommendations set a framework within which both lawyers and administrators can work by defining the stage at which the former should be drawn into the process of formulation of EEC law, their information needs and the circumstances in which they should attend meetings in Brussels.

The report and the role of the steering group

The 96 recommendations made by the team in a six-part report ranged from organizational matters, through detailed procedures in

the prosecution and civil litigation divisions, to proposals for improvements in the training arrangements for newly recruited lawyers. The steering group met on four occasions to receive papers on each of the main subject areas, and lived up to its name by steering the review team away from territory not within the terms of reference and by drawing attention to any factual inaccuracies in the papers. It did not see its role as extending as far as a radical reappraisal of the team's recommendations, so that the published report represents the views of the team albeit with general blessing from its mentors. Only one topic was referred back to the review team for further discussion with the Solicitor. As a result a revised form of wording was agreed and the new formula was submitted to the steering group and approved. The report was given wide circulation in the Solicitor's Office and among the administrators in headquarters. Copies were also sent to the senior managers in the Collections and to the Staff Side of the Departmental Whitley Council.

O and M practitioners will not need reminding that the hardest part of the battle often begins after the report has been issued. Getting the recommendations accepted and implemented, even if the customer has given them a welcome (whether cautious or enthusiastic) at the formulatory stage, is not always easy. In the present case most of the proposals were favourably received but the client involvement spreads across the department as a whole, so that some of the recommendations can be implemented only by consent of both laywers and administrators or in a few instances of the administrators alone.

The mechanism used to overcome the difficulties—and the possible inertia where several different interests are involved—is an implementation group, chaired in this case by a Principal Assistant Solicitor and including administrators from the personnel and technical directorates, and, of course, a member of the review team. The group will have the task of progressing the wide-ranging recommendations and ensuring that they are fully considered by all interested parties. It is hoped that this arrangement will speed the process of deciding the manner and timing of bringing into effect those recommendations that are acceptable. The implementation process may be protracted—some of the recommendations are in any case only practicable in the longer term—but the review has already produced some important benefits by way of stimulating thought and discussion, clarifying issues and opening up lines of communication.

For the review team the exercise has been of absorbing interest whether the activity of the moment was a day spent at the Uxbridge Magistrates' Court, a morning spent in the Sheriff's Court in Edinburgh, or a protracted team meeting to discuss the role of the prosecuting lawyer. To others who may be involved at some time in reviewing a legal branch we can certainly recommend the experience.

The Response to the Fulton Report — Part 3

In the August and November 1976 editions of MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN GOVERNMENT we published the first and second parts of an abridged version of a memorandum submitted by CSD to a Sub-Committee of the House of Commons Expenditure Committee. The following is the third and concluding part. —*Editor.*

Pensions and retirement

Civil Service superannuation

The Superannuation Act 1972 gave the Minister for the Civil Service power to lay down pension terms in administrative documents, thus enabling agreements with the Staff Side, e.g. on premature retirement, to be put into effect without further legislation.

The Joint Superannuation Committee of the National Whitley Council reviewed Civil Service superannuation arrangements and its report was published in February 1972 and gave rise to the introduction in June 1972 of the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme. That scheme provides for pension rights and their preservation for all those who have served for five years whether on established or unestablished terms; payment of transfer value, if desired, without any minimum qualifying period of service and now extended also to include the private sector; a short-service gratuity for those who have served for less than five years; a pension based on pay in the last year of service (rather than, as Fulton suggested, on the best three years); and a more flexible 'added years' provision. The review examined, as Fulton recommended, the feasibility of a change to a contributory pension scheme but concluded that the disadvantages of such a scheme outweighed any likely benefits.

Retirement

Agreement was reached in 1972 on the arrangements and compensation terms for premature retirement. The main points were the introduction of the concept of premature retirement on grounds of limited efficiency and for structural reasons; the provision of improved terms of compensation for those retired for these reasons and for redundancy, and the revision of the procedures not only for these 'retirements in the public interest' but also for retirement on grounds of inefficiency and for dismissal on disciplinary grounds, the main feature of which was the introduction of an independent Appeal Board. These changes implement Fulton's recommendations.

The question of the appropriate age for retirement is kept under review. An interdepartmental working party has recently studied the practice in departments and the adequacy of the central guidance on

the subject, without recommending any immediate change in the general approach.

The Civil Service and the community

Consultation and secrecy

The White Paper *Information and the Public Interest* (Cmnd. 4089) endorsed Fulton's wish to see more consultation and less secrecy in government. It reported that there had been an increasing trend in recent years to publish forecasts and other considerations involved in policy decisions; for instance, in Green Papers, in the Financial Statement accompanying the Budget and in the practice of publishing a report by planning consultants and holding a public inquiry before the siting of a new town. It concluded that such information should be published as a part of the decision-making process wherever possible. The White Paper also welcomed the growing practice of publishing statistical and other descriptive material about the work of government, and urged that it should continue. The White Paper found that many civil servants were already accustomed to explaining their work publicly—to Parliament and the press (at senior levels), and to local meetings (in the regions). It recommended further, though gradual, advance in this direction.

In 1971 the Franks Committee was appointed to make a more detailed inquiry into section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, which prohibits the unauthorized communication of any official information. The Committee found that the existing law applied to too wide a range of 'disclosures', and that there was too much uncertainty attaching to its interpretation and enforcement. It recommended that a new 'Official Information Act' should replace section 2 of the 1911 Act. The Government has announced its intention to replace this section.

Ministers and civil servants

Ministers agree all transfers of staff to posts with which they are in close contact, and the factors mentioned in the Fulton Report are fully taken into account. All appointments and moves of Permanent Secretaries require the approval of the Prime Minister.

Manpower

As Fulton recommended, the practice whereby new policy proposals are accompanied by detailed estimates of manpower costs has been continued. The then Prime Minister announced in November 1968 that in future the Memoranda accompanying Government Bills would include forecasts of any changes, or postponement of changes, in the non-industrial and industrial staff in government departments that are expected to result from a Bill. This information is now given; so, where necessary, are estimates of the effect on manpower requirements in the public sector as a whole.

Since the publication of Fulton the controls over staff numbers have

been progressively modified and improved. There is a rigorous check each autumn on the detail of each department's requirements, and agreed estimates of manpower and administrative expenses are prepared for the following financial year.

Within the agreed manpower estimates there is a constant regard to the need for economy. Complements are reviewed by staff inspectors, and CSD monitor and assist departmental inspection with an eye to consistency throughout the Service.

Implementation of the Fulton proposals

The then Prime Minister announced during the House of Commons debate on the Fulton Report in November 1968 that he had approved a proposal that CSD should regularly publish progress reports. Reports for 1969, 1970–71 and 1972–73 have been published. In addition, the National Whitley Council Joint Committee on the Fulton Report has issued four annual reports which have been widely circulated.

Accountants, lawyers and research officers

Accountants

In the light of the Fulton Report, an interdepartmental working party was set up under CSD chairmanship in 1969 to examine the problems of accountants in the Civil Service and make proposals for dealing with them. The working party made a number of specific recommendations, as a result of which detailed changes were made in the recruitment of accountants and direct-entry Principals (the latter to encourage accountants particularly to apply); a central career development panel for accountants was set up; a staff inspection was mounted to examine the scope for devolving work from qualified accountants to supporting staff; and consultations among departments were started to see how professional accountants could be used more widely by the Service.

Many of these initiatives could not be sustained in practice: the staff inspection found little significant scope for further devolution, and the Career Development Panel was unable, given the prevailing difficulties with recruitment and the different work needs of departments, to establish central career management at that time. It was clear that a deeper and more detailed diagnosis was required, and Sir Anthony Burney, a distinguished professional accountant in private practice, and Sir Ronald Melville, then Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Aviation Supply, were accordingly invited to undertake a thorough inquiry. This was started in 1971 and their report, *The Use of Accountants in the Civil Service*, was published in 1973.

The chief recommendations of the Melville-Burney Report concerned the creation of a Government Accountancy Service and the appointment of a head of profession to be responsible for it, and for the professional standards and careers of its members. Various more detailed recommendations concerning the recruitment and career management of accountants enlarged the ideas already put forward in the Fulton Report.

Mr. K. J. Sharp, TD, lately the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales, was appointed as head of profession on 3rd November 1975. The other recommendations of the Melville-Burney Report, and the broader issues of the role of accountants in the Civil Service, and of attracting high-calibre accountants to it, are being followed up.

In the meantime, a number of more limited, but nevertheless significant, developments have been effected:

(*a*) The recruiting arrangements for Basic and Senior Grade Accountants have been intensified, and flexibility has been improved, since the beginning of 1975: procedures have been speeded up and age limits modified: there has been some slight improvement in the rate at which vacancies are being filled.

(*b*) The Ministry of Defence (Procurement Executive) has developed its training of executive officers for the ICMA qualification, and now employs nearly 100 professionally qualified cost and management accountants.

(*c*) Bursary schemes have been established recently to provide for more administrators from all departments either to be trained as cost and management (ICMA) accountants at the Royal Army Pay Corps Training Centre, or to be articled to private practices outside the Service while training as chartered accountants; and the Civil Service College now runs a three-week course in financial management for administrators and a series of specialized accounting and internal audit courses for staff not requiring to be professionally qualified but who need to be trained to a level enabling them to operate competently new accounting and audit systems.

(*d*) CSD has a special Management Services Division concerned with advice on the development of accounting systems in departments, staffed by professionally qualified accountants; the Treasury also has a Management Accounting Unit under the Treasury Officer of Accounts which is similarly staffed; the Exchequer and Audit Department is proposing to follow the District Audit Service in training its executive staff for the CIPFA qualification; there are now nearly 800 professionally qualified accountants in the Civil Service (of whom over 400 are outside the Professional Accountant Class).

Lawyers

In the light of the Fulton recommendations the Management Committee for the Legal Class discussed possible ways of organizing the legal work of the Service to better advantage and of improving the career management of legal staff. Before agreement was reached on these matters the situation was altered by the machinery of government changes of October 1970, which raised the question whether legal services for the new 'giant' departments, DOE and DTI, should be

provided by the Treasury Solicitor or by departmental legal branches. Sir Edmund Compton, who had recently retired from the post of Comptroller and Auditor General, was invited to study the organization of the means for providing legal advice and services to the major departments in England and Wales, to consider what changes were called for, and to suggest suitable arrangements for the management of the Legal Class, having regard, amongst other material, to the report of the Fulton Committee (evidence and findings).

In his report, submitted in July 1971, Sir Edmund concluded that for the departments in which legal advice is a continuous element in the policy-making and management of the department, the department's own lawyers would be the proper source of that advice. This judgement applied to all the main departments in England and Wales with the exception of the Treasury, CSD, Ministry of Defence and the then Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. In these departments, where legal advice is only intermittently required, it should continue to be provided by the Treasury Solicitor. As regards civil litigation and conveyancing Sir Edmund concluded that, generally speaking, the expertise required is not special to the needs of particular departments and that, on grounds both of management of the business and effective deployment of the men, centralization under the Treasury Solicitor should be the rule. He suggested a pragmatic examination of departments employing their own non-advisory legal staff to test whether the work is so closely connected with the advisory side as to justify its retention, with the object of transferring the work to the Treasury Solicitor if a clear case for retention was not made. On the question of staff management, Sir Edmund recommended a collective system of central management, with the Treasury Solicitor as Head of the Legal Career Service. Adequate provision should be made for central authority to be equipped with information and knowledge of personalities. The Treasury Solicitor either personally or through his Establishment Officer should have a recognized right to take the initiative in inquiring into staff situations and personalities and in proposing changes of postings, particularly between departments.

The main recommendations in the Compton report were accepted and put into effect. The Treasury Solicitor has been appointed as Head of the Legal Career Service, consisting of the legal staff of most of the major departments in England and Wales. Some departments, such as the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Inland Revenue, remain outside the Legal Career Service but there is provision for consultation as necessary between those departments and central management. The former Management Committee has been reconstituted, with the Treasury Solicitor as Chairman, to advise on problems affecting the legal groups generally, and a Central Career Panel is charged with assisting the Head of the Legal Career Service to keep under review the manning of legal branches and the career development of members of the service.

Litigation and conveyancing work for government departments, except in a few highly specialized fields, has been centralized in the Treasury Solicitor's Office, departments continuing to be responsible for their own legal advisory work.

A number of changes have been made in the arrangements for recruitment and promotion with a view to encouraging young lawyers to enter the service. The recruitment position has recently improved so far as numbers are concerned, but the proportion of candidates of high quality is still disturbingly low.

Agreement in principle has been reached with the Law Society on articling clerks to solicitors in the Civil Service; a detailed scheme is being worked out to accommodate both non-professional staff serving in legal branches and young honours graduates direct from university. A 'Legal Apprentice Scheme' already operates in the Scottish Legal Service. As regards the other side of the profession, a number of former non-professional staff who read for the Bar while in the Civil Service are now members of the legal group.

The shortage of lawyers has made it difficult to give much positive encouragement to movement between departments, nor has there been any great demand from the staff themselves for such moves. Similarly, although opportunities are available to lawyers (as to other specialists) to gain experience of administrative work, very few have shown any desire to do so.

Devolution of work to non-professional staff has been taken a considerable way, and the scope for further extension may not be great. Improved career planning and personnel management will help in identifying staff with special aptitude for legal support work and in enabling them to find a satisfying career in that field, aided by appropriate training.

Research Officers

Proposals for the reorganization of the Research Officer Class have been the subject of prolonged and detailed discussion between CSD, other employing departments and the Staff Side. The disparate functions and numbers of Research Officers in different departments, and the present grade structure of the Research Officer Class, have seriously impeded agreement on an improved yet practicable structure.

Recent revised proposals, now with the Staff Side, are designed to minimize the procedural difficulties of restructuring while nevertheless effecting the essential improvements required: more clearly defined and homogeneous functions, provision for the grading of posts above the Senior Research Officer (Principal-equivalent) level as the needs of the work occasion, add scope accordingly for more appropriate career management. The proposals provide for the establishment of a new Research and Planning Category comprising two occupational groups: a Social Science Group and a Planning Research Group. The proposed grade structures of the new category provide for posts at

Senior Principal and Assistant Secretary-equivalent levels. Posts and officers now in the Research Officer Class, and certain others already grouped at the higher levels in other groups or classes, would be transferred to the new groups. Special arrangements would be put in hand to establish appropriate career management machinery and review entry requirements.

Precise definitions of 'social science' or 'planning' to describe the work of the new groups in practical terms have proved to be elusive. The delineation of the new groups closely reflects departments' experience with attempts to bring about career moves for individual officers within the Research Officer Class. In general terms the Social Science Group will comprise posts where work is concerned directly with systematic approaches to discussion about patterns of behaviour among people in contemporary society, about the impact of government policies thereon, and about the implications for future policy thereof. And the Planning Research Group will comprise posts whose work is similar, but concerned more directly with resource allocation, environment and infrastructure—physical or industrial, and local, regional, national or international. The proposals contain a statement to the effect that the tasks of both groups will include, for example:

(*a*) Establishing and/or maintaining a departmental capability in relevant fields by linking selected, valid, external research and experience to departments' policy interests, and conducting relevant research, development, consultancy, and other work within departments.

(*b*) Playing an active part in helping policy divisions to bear in mind the implications for their work of relevant external experience and research findings.

(*c*) Attempting to form a perspective of longer-term trends as a means of anticipating future difficulties.

(*d*) Refining the methods and practical utility of relevant disciplines, establishing professional standards against which methods and results may be evaluated, and maintaining the objectivity of inquiry and reporting.

(*e*) Contributing to the proper control of relevant work commissioned from outside the Civil Service.

(*f*) Fully exploiting available data to improve the practical value to policy, and assisting the development of appropriate data and statistics.

Management Accounting in the Civil Service

M. L. TAYLOR, Civil Service Department

A new title in the Management Services Handbook series recently published is *Management Accounting in the Civil Service*. It has been prepared by the Management Services (Accountancy) Division of CSD and is intended for the use of line managers and for finance and management services staff. The aim is to promote a wider understanding of the potential application of management accounting within the Civil Service.

As with all big organizations proper management control is essential within the Civil Service. This is particularly so at the present time. The achievement of this involves a complex interrelationship of processes such as forecasting, planning, organizing, motivating, co-ordinating, controlling and communicating. The management accountant has a distinct contribution to make by assisting management to take decisions in all these areas.

Management accounting is a big subject including financial and cost accounting, standard costing and budgetary control, investment appraisal, financial planning, pricing and the use of costs for decision-making. The handbook does not purport to be an accounting treatise, nor does it aim to give a comprehensive account of what has happened in Civil Service management accounting though it does contain some examples. It is as much concerned with attitudes as with techniques and attempts to provide an introduction to the subject which will be of interest to all managers who are concerned with the measurement of output and the controlling of costs, or with the use of financial information to assist decision-making.

The handbook discusses the need to supplement present financial information and possible future needs. It defines management accounting, discusses the relationship between vote, financial and cost accounts and describes broadly cost accounting and budgetary control. The developing role of the management accountant is discussed, particularly in the areas of planning and control. Some applications of management accounting in the Civil Service are described and the implications of policy constraints on 'efficient' operation are discussed.

The handbook ends with some questions for the manager and a few hints. It concludes that much has been and is being done, but that much remains to be done. The system must suit the organization and may often entail no more than the bringing together and analysing of information that already exists and its presentation in a concise, more telling form.

It is hoped that the handbook will give readers some idea of the areas where management accounting may be of use, but it is not intended as a 'do-it-yourself' guide. In many cases specialist advice will be required. Departments themselves may have a source of professional advice in their own management services and/or accounting divisions, but the Management Services (Accountancy) Division of CSD or AP2 Division in the Treasury are prepared to offer advice and assistance.

Departments may obtain copies of the handbook (General Service Forms Series, E. 136) from Her Majesty's Stationery Office through the normal departmental publications demand channels. Persons and organizations outside the Civil Service may obtain copies from the Civil Service Department (MSSU), Room 2/100, Old Admiralty Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2AZ, price £1·10 (including postage within the United Kingdom). Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to 'Civil Service Department'.

Management Consultants in Government

We have from time to time published lists of management consultancy assignments commissioned by government departments. The last such list, covering the calendar year 1975, appeared in the February 1976 edition of MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN GOVERNMENT.

A list of such assignments commissioned during the calendar year 1976 now follows. The list excludes:

(*a*) Computer consultancy (including assistance with computer systems and programming).

(*b*) The employment of consulting staff, whether on secondment from their firms or not, to augment departmental teams.

Advice to departments on the use of management consultants is given in *Code of Practice for the Use of Management Consultants by Government Departments*, copies of which may be obtained from Her Majesty's Stationery Office (price 31p to persons and organizations outside the Civil Service).

Department	*Nature of assignment*	*Consultant used*
Cabinet Office	Study of the UK power plant equipment industry	Booz Allen & Hamilton International BV.
	To study the overseas representation of the Export Intelligence Service	Market & Opinion Research International
Civil Service Department	Job satisfaction studies	Imitax Ltd.
	Analysis of surveys of remuneration of barristers and solicitors, on behalf of the Royal Commission on Legal Services (England and Wales, and Northern Ireland)	Coopers & Lybrand Associates Ltd.
Defence, Ministry of	To install work measurement techniques at REME Donnington	Inbucon/AIC Ltd.
Environment, Department of the ..	Research study into the interaction of land use and transportation	Local Government Operational Research Unit
	Research project for monitoring development plans for local authorities	Institute for Operational Research
	Study of international cross-Channel transport 1975–1990	Coopers & Lybrand Associates Ltd.
	Study of the National Freight Corporation	Coopers & Lybrand Associates Ltd.
	Study of the finances of the Port of London Authority	Price Waterhouse Associates
Health and Social Security, Department of	Further work on taxonomy for the mentally ill	Nimrod Consultancy Services Ltd.
	OR study of social security benefits—review and checking	Orcon Services Ltd. and Wootton, Jeffreys & Partners
	Information system for the Cornwall Area Health Authority	Logica Ltd.
	Study of work flow and information within and between local Social Security offices: 'run and maintain' contract	Orcon Services Ltd.
	OR study of treatment of Hodgkin's disease with respect to length of survival	Logica Ltd.
Home Office	To investigate an alternative to the mail bag industry for certain prisoners	Atkins Planning
	To investigate, in broad terms, new markets for prison industries and how best to allocate resources	Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd.

Department	*Nature of assignment*	*Consultant used*
Home Office—*continued*	Marketing and technical appraisal of the ICI structural formable decorative process, in order to assess its suitability for use in prison industries	Furniture Industry Research Association
	To prepare and present a management training and development package for senior staff in the probation service	The Grubb Institute
	To consider the viability of setting up a production unit for the manufacture of precision turned metal parts	Denton Associates
	To find work for employing 250 men at Featherstone and Portsmouth prisons; identify products and prepare design specifications	Bowhurst Ltd.
Industry, Department of	Maintenance cost comparison study	Centre for Interfirm Comparison
	To examine the prospects of Greenwell Drydocks Ltd.	Touche Ross & Co.
	Market study of dust pressing equipment in ceramic tableware manufacture	Research Associates
	Study of computer pattern grading in garment and footwear manufacturing	Kurt Salmon Associates
	Market study of engine testing equipment	Ingersoll Manufacturing Consultants
	Studies of footwear manufacturing industry's costs, productivity, design and materials supply	Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association Ltd.
Manpower Services Commission ..	A study of manpower planning	Institute of Manpower Studies
	To survey the ESA and TSA's handling of redundancy at Linwood	Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd.
Royal Ordnance Factories	To advise on an incentive scheme for certain skilled workers at RSA Enfield, and to assist in implementation	Organisation Development Ltd.
Training Services Agency	Pilot survey to provide data to assist decision-making on firms and public sector organizations not covered by the Industrial Training Board	Industrial Training Services
	An analysis of critical core skills in ITB industries	Keller Associates Inc.
	Women and management	Ashridge Management College
Treasury	Further assistance with the implementation of the financial information system	Arthur Andersen & Co.

Management Bookshelf

Mrs. B. M. HOWARD, Civil Service Department

We believe that it will be more helpful if this regular feature in future concentrates on publications of a specific subject area (or areas) rather than roaming over the wide range of interests of our readers; doing this will enable us to mention not only the newest books, which may not necessarily be the best, but also the standard texts as well as directories and guides to the literature. We would welcome suggestions of topics that might be discussed. In this issue the spotlight is on computers.

It is impossible for one short article to even begin to discuss the wealth of literature there is on the computing industry and its applications. It is necessary therefore to restrict the scope. The emphasis will be on some basic sources of information, allied to a review of one of the faster growing aspects: data transmission.

Alan Pritchard's *Guide to Computer Literature:* an introductory survey of the sources of information (Bingley; second edition, 1972; 194 pages; £2·75) remains one of the standard descriptions of the means of controlling the literature. Its chapters cover journals, research reports, trade literature, bibliographies, standards, hardware and software information sources and statistics. The speed of information transfer on computer topics often means that it is to the journal, rather than to the book, that the practitioner must turn, but the bewildering range of periodicals published in the English language makes it difficult for him to be sure that he is seeing the most helpful ones and is not wasting his precious reading time. One way of maximizing this time is to scan the weekly *Computing Journal Abstracts* issued by the National Computing Centre as part of their subscription. The layout of this bulletin makes it quick to glance through and to pick out items relevant to one's current preoccupations. The pages are printed single-sided so that selected items can be cut out to form a personal index. The items included have been carefully selected from the very large number of journals searched by the information staff of the NCC. Anbar's *Accounting and Data Processing Abstracts* are published eight times a year in association with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, and cover the applications of computers in business. This service too is easy to scan; its contents are selective and the comments indicative rather than purely descriptive. Another regular publication especially strong on business applications and Western European periodicals is *New Literature on Automation* (published 11 times a year by the Netherlands Centre for Informatics; annual subscription Dfl 150).

The publications mentioned in the previous paragraph are useful for

scanning to keep oneself up to date. Other indexes and abstracts with more concentrated content are suitable for searching when specific information—rather than current awareness—is needed. The *Quarterly Bibliography of Computers and Data Processing* (published by Applied Computer Research, Phoenix, Arizona; subscription £38·18 p.a.) is intended primarily for those at the practising end of the computer profession, such as consultants and users. The bibliography does not include research orientated or academic literature. A wider based coverage is given by *Computer Abstracts* (published by the Technical Information Company, Jersey, Channel Islands; annual subscription £38·50). Among the subjects covered are logical design, artificial intelligence, mathematics, programming, digital circuits and components, data storage, input-output, education and personnel, as well as applications. Possibly the most comprehensive international information service is that provided by INSPEC whose *Computer and Control Abstracts* (covering approximately 27,000 items a year) is available in hard-copy and in microfiche, with back issues on microfilm. A catalogue from the Institution of Electrical Engineers, Savoy Place, London WC2R 0BL, gives full details of the publication programme, which also covers physics, electrical and electronic engineering. A magnetic tape service is available for organizations which operate their own computer-based information service, while on-line retrieval is possible through various centres—information on the UK facility can be obtained from Brian Kingsmill, DIALTECH, c/o Department of Industry, Abell House, John Islip Street, London SW1P 4LN.

A non-technical discussion for the line manager of the exciting new prospects which are being opened up by the international telecommunications networks is provided by Murray Laver's *Computers, Communications and Society* (Oxford University Press; 1975; 99 pages; £3·50). The potential of these developments can affect all aspects of our lives and raises questions for the administrator, the politician and the man in the street. A more technical approach is adopted by David Hebditch in his *Data Communications:* an introductory guide (Elek Science; 1975; 223 pages; £4·25) which has been written for the ADP professional with batch processing experience who is about to get involved in the field of data communication. An international perspective is provided by two studies published by the OECD in their Information Studies series: number 3, *Computers and Telecommunications* (1973; £2), and number 8, *Applications of Computer/Telecommunications Systems* (1975; £3·60) (both available in the UK through HMSO). Inevitably, data transmission involves the national postal and telecommunications authority; it is, therefore, not too surprising to find that the UK Post Office, in conjunction with the National Computing Centre, have issued a *Handbook of Data Communications* (NCC; 1975; 396 pages; £8·50). Although it will be a good reference for managers and for newcomers to computing, its greatest value will probably be for systems analysts, programmers and systems engineers. Experience gained from organizing the Post

Office data communications training courses has enabled the authors to cover those subjects found to be of most interest—including the facilities available internationally. Those who need to keep in touch with this rapidly expanding field will find useful the *Data Communications Dictionary*, by Charles Sippl (Van Nostrand Reinhold; 1976; 545 pages; £15·20). Cross-indexed for easy use, its 14,500 terms include carrier systems, special data networks, equipment and components.

Finally one might suggest two further titles for the computer bookshelf. One a standard work of reference: the *Computer Users' Year Book* (latest edition 1976; price £16·95). This up-date contains several new features including detailed information on the characteristics of microprocessors and minicomputers, details of some packaged configurations and a section concerned with data security. Although operational reliability is only one part of the problem of computer security, a manual has been specially prepared for pessimistic systems designers: *Integrity and Recovery in Computer Systems*, by T. K. Gibbons (NCC in conjunction with the London School of Economics and Political Science; 1976; 137 pages; £4·50). As we all know, computer systems do break down, often at awkward times and in novel ways, and the designer must, therefore, constantly consider recovery procedures, designing his system for maximum integrity. The book was published simultaneously in the United Kingdom and the United States, and has been well received on both sides of the Atlantic—see *New Scientist* (25th November 1976) and *EDP Analyser* (November 1976). It is a clear and cogent exposition of the subject which will be of undoubted value both to the computer professional and the inquiring layman.

Some recently published titles

Management consulting: A guide to the profession. Published by the International Labour Office, Geneva (368 pages; price 45 Swiss francs)

Business and society: Tradition and change by T. Kempner, K. MacMillan and K. Hawkins. Published by Penguin Books Limited (188 pages; price £1)

Inter-organizational relations. Edited by W. M. Evan. Published by Penguin Books Limited (442 pages; price £1·75)

Management techniques in administration and finance: Aids to decision-making by C. S. Deverell. Published by Gee & Co. (Publishers) Limited (328 pages; price £3·95)

Management and productivity: An international directory of institutions and information sources. Published by the International Labour Office, Geneva (233 pages; price 25 Swiss francs) —*Editor.*

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I was very sad to learn of the death of Jock Simpson, but glad to have the opportunity to read the tribute which you are planning for your February edition. Your readers may have seen my own tribute which was published in *The Times* on 5th January.

I was much taken with 'Accentuate the Positive'. It brought back to me how necessary such a corrective was in the earliest days of O & M, and how great was the danger that it would in Jock's words 'become staffing inspection under another name'.

The battle of the fundamental change from the negative to the positive was hard to win and very hard indeed in the Treasury itself. Treasury control meant complementing to ensure (the words of a Treasury Circular of 1920) 'economy in all matters of staff' and even labour *saving* machines were but substitutes for staff and as such under the same kind of control.

It needs to be said in fairness to the past that the system of government accounting was largely to blame, in treating once for all capital expenditure on a machine in the same way as the annually recurring expenditure on the staff it would replace.

Nevertheless a great deal of good had been done by the staff of the Treasury who examined proposals for using office machines. They were very competent at assessing the worthwhileness of installing machines and at advising on how to reap the greatest benefit from them. I remember how one member of the staff we were glad to inherit told me that he had kept a little book of the accumulating total of *annual* savings which his installations had brought but had given up the practice when the total had exceeded £6·5 million!

The Civil Service during the war was adapting to the new conditions by devolution of authority to departments. Staff who had been used to power to *direct* any and every department in 'all matters of staff, organization and office management' found it hard to accept that their skilled recommendations no longer had the same force, and that their hard work might be set aside and wasted and not, as they thought, sufficiently respected.

The test case arose, early in my initiation, over office machines for Army pay. Treasury O & M had recommended such and such machines with such and such methods, but the War Office wanted so and so instead.

Before I had been appointed I had asked Sir Richard Hopkins what were the sanctions which would apply if there should arise a clash of judgement, and I will always remember his answer: 'I will ask the Permanent Secretary of the department to come and have tea, and we will discuss the question. If it is a difficult case I would ask West, the messenger, to give us some cake with the tea'.

The doctrine of O & M as a staff function offers great advantages provided, in Jock's words, it 'accentuates the positive', but it is doomed only to failure if it arouses even suspicions of the negative.

I was immensely grateful for the accession of Jock Simpson as Deputy Director. His wisdom and, as you Mr. Editor say, his charming personality were what established O & M firmly on permanent lines. I went off as a Parliamentary Candidate in the 1945 General Election proud of what had been achieved and confident that under Jock Simpson Treasury O & M Division would grow and flourish—as indeed it has and will.

Yours sincerely,

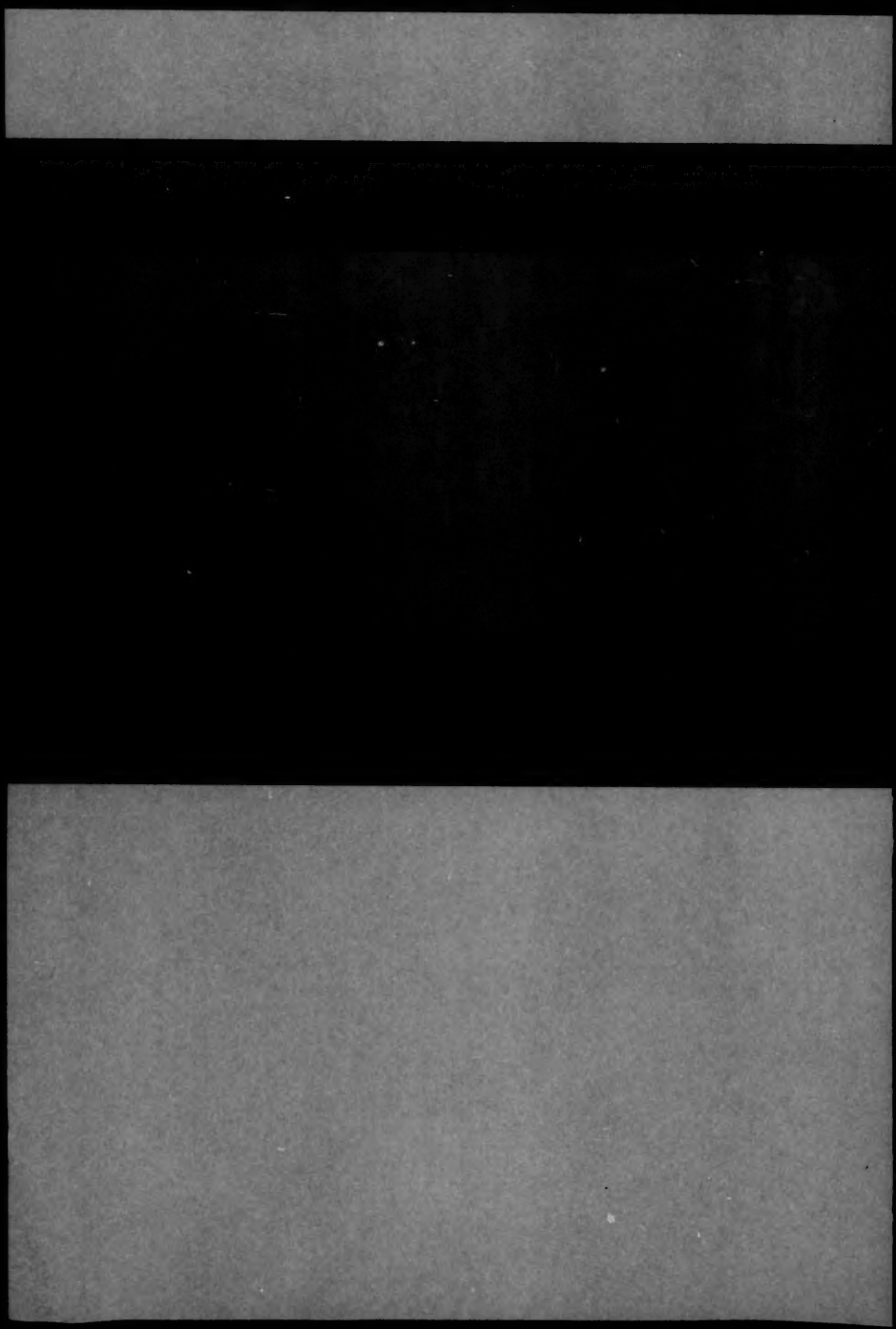
JAMES PITMAN

Computer Installations for Government Departments

A list of all Government computers as at 1st January 1976 was published as a supplement to the May 1976 edition of MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN GOVERNMENT. Details of computers ordered during the period 1st July to 30th September 1976 are shown in the following table.

DATE OF ORDER	DEPARTMENT	LOCATION	MAIN USES	MANUFACTURER* AND TYPE OF COMPUTER
1B Computers on order for administrative and general purposes				
July 1976	Defence (Central)	Cheadle Hulme	Industrial civil pay and records	ICL 1903T
July 1976	Defence (Navy)	Taunton	Production of marine charts	ICL 1903T
July 1976	Defence (Navy)	Llangennech	Stores accounting	IBM 370/115
August 1976	Inland Revenue	Liverpool	PAYE information retrieval	Honeywell 716
August 1976	Defence (Air)	Hendon	Stores control	ICL 4/72
September 1976	Defence (Air)	Bracknell	Library service	DEC PDP 11/34
2B Computers on order for scientific and technical purposes				
July 1976	Defence (Air)	Cranwell	Training and research	DEC System 20
September 1976	Defence (Procurement Executive)	Porton Down	Environmental analysis	DEC PDP 11/34

*Manufacturer key:

DEC	Digital Equipment Co. (UK) Ltd.
Honeywell	Honeywell Information Systems Ltd.
IBM	International Business Machines (UK) Ltd.
ICL	International Computers Ltd.

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